

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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FOR ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, US, EG

SUBJECT: REFITTING EGYPTIAN MIG-21S

1. IN ADDITION TO BEECHER ARTICLE IN BOSTON GLOBE JULY 31,
QUOTED IN FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH, GWERTZMAN STORY IN TIMES
AUGUST 1 STATES: QUOTE:

ISRAEL'S SUPPORTERS IN WASHINGTON HAVE SAID FOR THREE
WEEKS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WAS ABOUT TO GIVE PERMISSION
TO LOCKHEED AND GENERAL ELECTRIC TO HELP REFIT EGYPTIAN
MIG-21 FIGHTERS WITH BRITISH SPEY ENGINES, BUILT BY ROLLS-
ROYCE. THIS HAS NOT BEEN CONFIRMED BY THE ADMINISTRATION.
END QUOTE.

2. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF BEECHER ARTICLE ENTITLED "U.S.
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PLANS TO HELP EGYPT REBUILD SOVIET MIGS": QUOTE:

CONGRESSIONAL SOURCES SAY THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS
SECRETLY GIVEN ITS BLESSINGS TO AN ARRANGEMENT WHEREIN TWO
AMERICAN DEFENSE CONTRACTORS WOULD HELP EGYPT REBUILD ITS
FLEET OF SOVIET-MADE MIG-21 JETS USING BRITISH ENGINES.

THE U.S. FIRMS, THE SOURCES SAY, PLAN TO UTILIZE THEIR DESIGNERS AND ENGINEERS BUT NO AMERICAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT, THUS AVOIDING CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE HAD THE USE OF U.S. JET ENGINES BEEN PROPOSED.

WHEN COMPLETED, THE REBUILDING EFFORT WOULD NOT ONLY SOLVE EGYPT'S MOUNTING PROBLEM OF HOW TO KEEP ITS FRONT-LINE RUSSIAN COMBAT AIRCRAFT OPERATING WITHOUT SOVIET SPARE PARTS, BUT IT ALSO SHOULD IMPROVE THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE MIGS. THE ROLLS ROYCE SPEY ENGINE THAT IS TO GO INTO THE MIG IS SAID TO BE MORE POWERFUL THAN THE RUSSIAN ENGINE IT REPLACES.

SOURCES SAY THE MIG-21 ARRANGEMENT SHOULD STRENGTHEN EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT AMONG HIS GENERALS, SOME OF WHOM HAVE BEEN URGING HIM TO SWALLOW HIS PRIDE AND PATCH UP HIS RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW IN ORDER TO CHECK A CONTINUING DETERIORATION OF EGYPT'S ARMED FORCES.

IT WOULD ALSO RELIEVE PRESSURE ON SADAT TO EXPLAIN WHY THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN WILLING TO SUPPLY ONLY C130 TRANSPORTS AND OTHER NON-LETHAL MILITARY EQUIPMENT.

A SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL, ASKED ABOUT THE STORY, SAID IT WAS GENERALLY CORRECT BUT "TOO SENSITIVE" TO TALK ABOUT AT THIS TIME.
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SECRETARY OF STATE CYRUS VANCE LEAVES TONIGHT ON A TWO-WEEK MISSION TO EGYPT, SYRIA, JORDAN, LEBANON, SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL TRYING TO REMOVE OBSTACLES IN THE PATH OF A NEW GENEVA CONFERENCE SEEKING A COMPREHENSIVE MID-EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT.

ACCORDING TO LAW, U.S. FIRMS NEED NO GOVERNMENT PERMISSION TO GET INVOLVED IN THE EGYPTIAN PROJECT, SINCE NO AMERICAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT IS INVOLVED, BUT THE TWO CONTRACTORS WANTED WASHINGTON'S INFORMAL ASSENT BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF THE PROJECTED DEAL. THEY GOT IT. BUT SOURCES CAUTIONED THAT TO THE BEST OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE NO CONTRACTS HAVE BEEN SIGNED YET.

TECHNICAL EXPERTS SAY IT IS NO EASY MATTER TO REPLACE ONE AIRCRAFT ENGINE WITH ANOTHER.

APPARENTLY ROLLS ROYCE DID NOT FEEL COMFORTABLE TRYING TO TACKLE THE RE-ENGINEERING AND REBUILDING JOB ITSELF, SO THE TWO AMERICAN COMPANIES--ONE AN AIRCRAFT MANUFACTURER, THE OTHER AN ENGINE MAKER--WERE APPROACHED TO PARTICIPATE

IN THE PROJECT IN EGYPT.

AS PART OF A WIDE-RANGING EFFORT TO FIND SUBSTITUTES FOR ITS SEVERED SOVIET CONNECTION, EGYPT HAS ENLISTED A FRENCH COMPANY TO MANUFACTURE SPARE PARTS FOR ITS SOVIET-MADE SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILES AND A BRITISH FIRM TO PUT NEW ENGINES IN ITS RUSSIAN TANKS.

WHEN SADAT CAME TO WASHINGTON IN MAY HE CARRIED WITH HIM A LONG SHOPPING LIST OF U.S. WEAPONS HE WISHED TO BUY. INCLUDED WERE F5 COMBAT JETS AND TOW ANTITANK MISSILES.

AS REPORTED IN THE GLOBE ON JULY 18, THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AGREED ONLY TO SELL AT THIS TIME 14 MORE C130 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TRANSPORTS (ADDED TO THE SIX SOLD LAST YEAR), 12 GROUND-LAUNCHED AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE DRONES, AND SIX LONG-RANGE PHOTORECONNAISSANCE CAMERA SYSTEMS.

THE REBUILDING OF THE MIG-21 WAS APPROVED AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, SOURCES SAY.

EGYPT HAS ABOUT 200 MIG-21S. THEY REPRESENT ITS PRINCIPAL AIR SUPERIORITY FIGHTER. BUT EVEN WITH IMPROVED ENGINES AND ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS, THE MIGS ARE NOT EXPECTED TO TILT THE MILITARY BALANCE IN THE MIDEAST.

ISRAEL'S 200 F4 FIGHTER-BOMBERS ARE CONSIDERED MORE THAN A MATCH FOR THE MIG-21. IN ADDITION, ISRAEL IS GETTING 50 VERY ADVANCED F15 FIGHTERS AND HOPES TO GET PERMISSION SOON TO BUY AT LEAST 100 F16 FIGHTERS.

BUT UPGRADING THE MIG-21S WILL KEEP THE EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE RESPECTABLE AS IT GETS NEW FRENCH MIRAGE F1 FIGHTERS AND PERHAPS OTHER WESTERN COMBAT JETS AS WELL.
END QUOTE.
CHRISTOPHER

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